

San Antonio, TX - Today, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), Lieutenant General James B. Peake (Ret.), M.D., joined Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) for a tour and roundtable discussion at the American GI Forum National Veterans Outreach Program. Rodriguez, a member of the U.S. House Veterans Affairs Committee, invited Peake to San Antonio to introduce him to the American GI Forum's program for homeless veterans and to discuss other health care related issues. At a roundtable with local veterans and veteran group representatives a number of issues important to veterans, including legislation by Rodriguez, were discussed.

“It was good to have Secretary Peake here in San Antonio hearing about what the current challenges are for the VA and for so many of our Texas veterans,” said Rodriguez. “I hope Secretary Peake takes what he learned from the veterans and health care professionals here today back to Washington so that he can make improvements to the heavily burdened VA system.”

As of mid-February more than more than 5,200 veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have enrolled in the VA in South Texas. Rodriguez and Peake discussed HR 2689, a bill Rodriguez has written specifically for troops with mental health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) issues that would expand health care and outreach opportunities for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan .

The bill would include National Guard and reserve troops as well as provide services to immediate family members of returning troops. Additionally, the bill would address rural health care access by allowing the VA to contract with community health care facilities so veterans wouldn't be required to travel long distances in order to reach a provider.

Rodriguez and Peake also further discussed access to health care for veterans at Laughlin Air Force Base where Rodriguez has been working to forge a partnership between the VA and the Air Force in Del Rio in order to address the needs of Del Rio and other Middle Rio Grande veterans.

The final topic of conversation between Rodriguez and Peake was about increasing capacity for homeless veterans. In Texas alone there are approximately 16,000 homeless veterans. The VA only has capacity for 233 beds.

"Because he is familiar with San Antonio, Secretary Peake has an understanding and appreciation for many of the challenges the VA faces here and I know he is committed to making things better," continued Rodriguez. I hope that he will take away from this visit with local veterans some ideas that will become solutions for helping our nation's veterans."



Congressman Rodriguez, Secretary Peake and Carlos Martinez, the President of the American GI F



Congressman Rodriguez and Secretary Peake visit with local Veterans organization representatives

